

North Dakota Foster Care Provider Recruitment and Retention Survey 2007 Snapshot

North Dakota Department of Human Services: Children and Family Services
Julie Bruns, Research Analyst
Phone:(701)328-8925

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Executive Summary

The recruitment and retention of foster parents is a primary concern of the child welfare system. Across the state, there is a serious shortage of foster homes for abused and neglected children who are unable to remain in their home and need temporary care.

The Foster Care Recruitment and Retention Survey is the first step in obtaining feedback from foster parents about being a foster parent in North Dakota. This report summarizes input from 305 currently licensed family foster care providers on foster parent training, staff support, and reasons for becoming and continuing in the role of foster parents.

This report delivers the following aggregate survey results:

- 79% of foster parents stated the initial foster parent training adequately prepared them to become foster parents.
- 86% of foster parents rated their access to and content of ongoing training as satisfactory.
- 90% of foster parents were satisfied with their interaction with the licensing worker.
- 81% of foster parents rated the adequacy of their communication with the child's case worker/other social worker as adequate.
- 79% of foster parents agreed with the statement, "I feel like an important part of a professional team."
- 91% of foster/adoptive parent support group participants were satisfied with the support they received.

Foster parents are in a position to nurture children in their care so that they thrive and grow into responsible, caring adults. They have a voice. Future recruitment and retention is contingent on listening to what the current foster parents have to say.

Introduction

On September 19, 2007, the Foster Care Recruitment and Retention Survey was mailed to all licensed North Dakota family foster care providers. The 771 licensed family, therapeutic, and affidavit tribal foster care providers were mailed a copy of the cover letter and survey (Appendix A) to their current address as listed in CCWIPS. The family foster care providers were given a second opportunity to complete the survey if they attended the 2007 North Dakota Foster Parent Fall Conference and if they were unable to return it by the October 3, 2007 deadline. Forty percent (305) of family foster care providers participated in the survey.

The survey is double-sided, composed of 24 closed-ended and open-ended questions. Survey data are reported in the aggregate. Participant responses are excluded in this report for the six open-ended questions (referred to throughout the text as located in Appendix B through Appendix H).

Foster care providers may be licensed to care for children in one or more of the following:

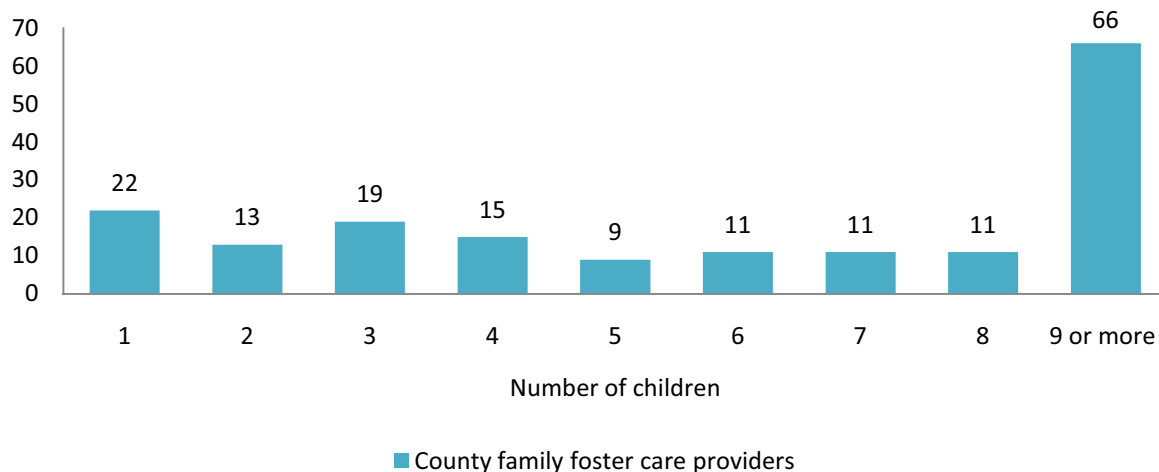
- county family foster care
- therapeutic family foster care
- family support (PATH)
- shelter care
- respite care

Seventeen of the 305 respondents indicated that they have not had any children placed in their care since they became licensed providers. Nine of the 17 provided an explanation as to why they have not had a placement (Appendix C). Three of these responses suggest the provider had not received a placement due to recent licensure as a foster parent.

Placements

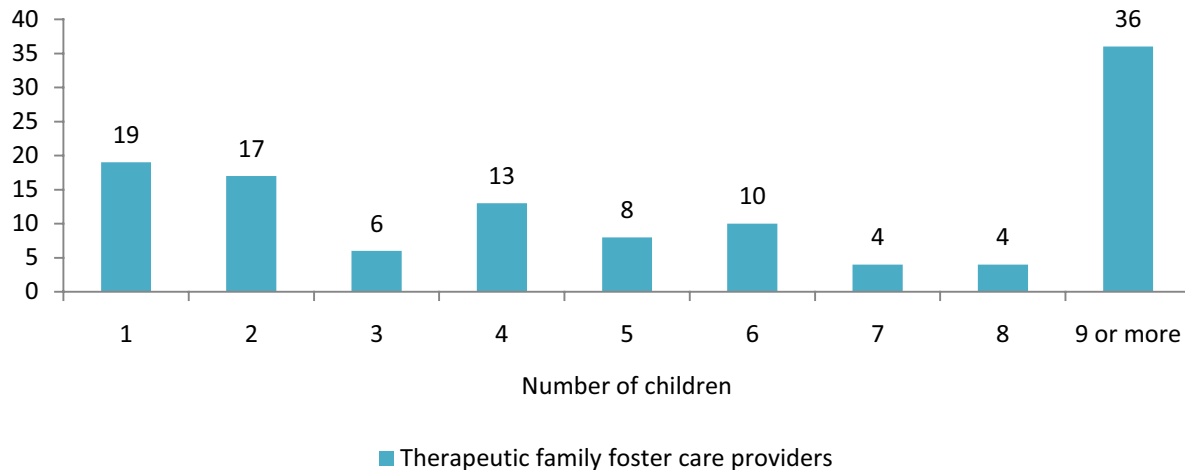
Of the 305 respondents, 177 indicated that they have cared for one or more children as a county family foster care provider (Figure 1). The most common response was nine or more children (66) cared for over the duration of time the provider has been licensed.

Figure 1. What is the total number of foster children you have cared for as a county family foster care provider?



Thirty-six of the 117 therapeutic family foster care respondents have cared for nine or more children while 19 have cared for one child (Figure 2). Therapeutic family foster care providers may be licensed solely for therapeutic care or in combination with other foster care licensure (i.e. family support/PATH).

Figure 2. What is the total number of foster children you have cared for as a therapeutic family foster care provider?



Foster Care Recruitment and Retention Survey (N=117)

Of the 110 respondents, 54 stated that they have cared for one child as a foster home with intent to adopt (Table 1). Nine providers indicated they are a foster home with intent to adopt and have cared for four children. This does not necessarily mean that they have adopted any or all of the four children. The provider may have opted to adopt one of the four children under their care.

Table 1. What is the total number of foster children you have cared for as a foster home with intent to adopt?

Number of children	Number of Providers
1	54
2	24
3	16
4	9
5	2
9 or more	5
Total	110

Foster Care Recruitment and Retention Survey (N=110)

Over half of the respondents (37) have cared for one child as a foster parent for a specified child (Table 2). Fourteen providers have cared for two children; one or both may have been for a specified child. For example, a foster parent may have become licensed solely to care for their relative's child. Yet, the provider may have cared for children in addition to the specified child.

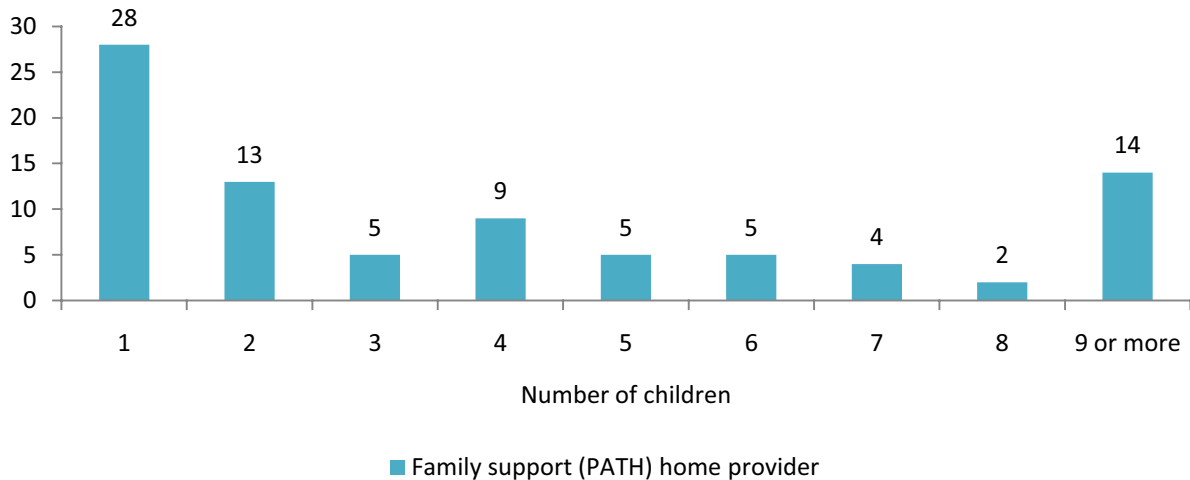
Table 2. What is the total number of foster children you have cared for as a foster parent for a specified child?

Number of children	Number of Providers
1	37
2	14
3	4
4	4
5	2
9 or more	8
Total	69

Foster Care Recruitment and Retention Survey (N=69)

Eighty-five foster care providers responded that they have cared for children as a family support (PATH) home over the course of their licensure (Figure 3). One child was the most common (28) followed by nine or more children (14) and two children (13).

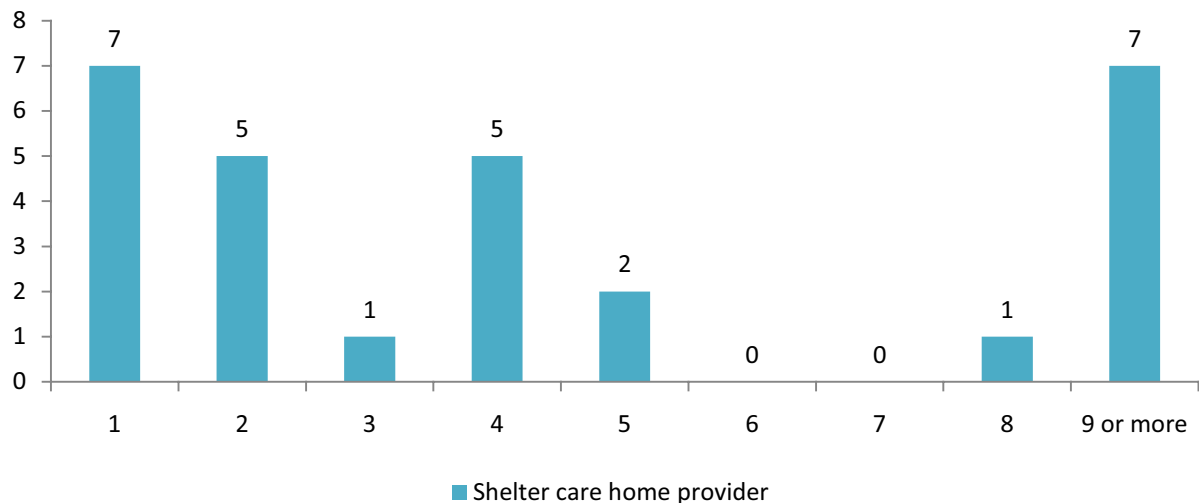
Figure 3. What is the total number of foster children you have cared for as a family support (PATH) home?



Foster Care Recruitment and Retention Survey (N=85)

There were 28 foster care provider respondents indicating they have provided care for children as a shelter care home (Figure 4). The most common responses were seven foster parents expressing they had one child and nine or more children, respectively.

Figure 4. What is the total number of foster children you have cared for as a shelter care home?



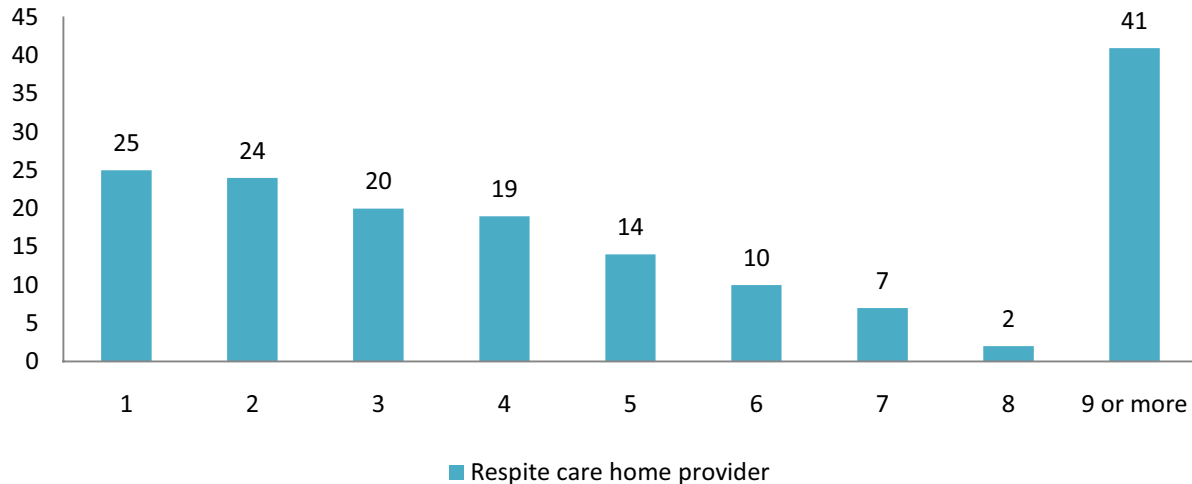
Foster Care Recruitment and Retention Survey (N=28)

Respite Care Providers

Respite care is not considered to be a foster care placement. Over half (162) of the 305 survey respondents have provided respite care for foster care children (Figure 5). Forty-one providers have cared for 9 or more children as a respite care home.

Of the 17 providers who have not had a placement in their home (Appendix C), six have provided temporary care for a child thus providing a break for the foster care provider.

Figure 5. What is the total number of foster children you have cared for as a respite care home?

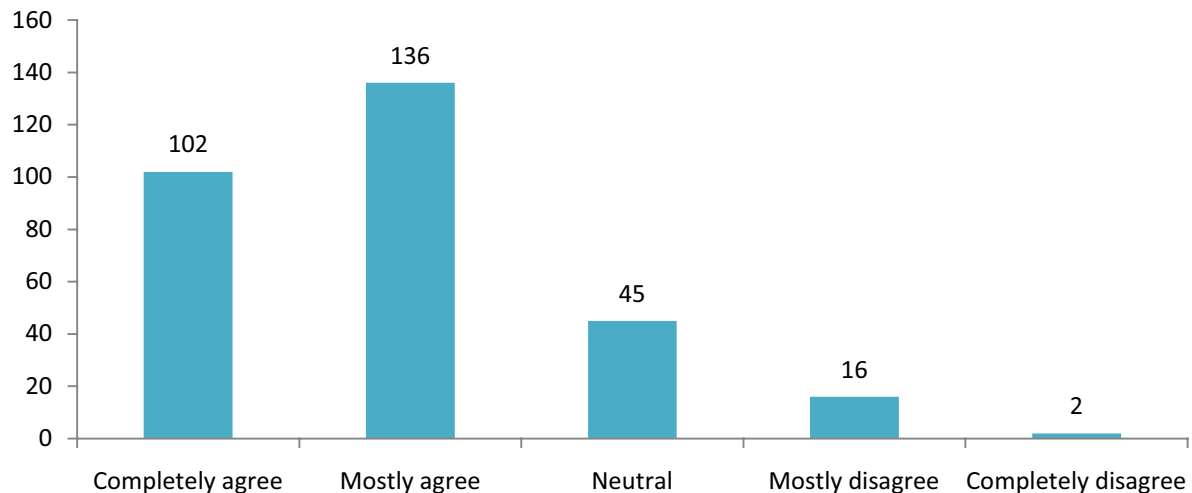


Foster Care Recruitment and Retention Survey (N=162)

Foster Parent Training

Of the 301 respondents, 79% (238) agreed that the initial training adequately prepared them to become foster parents (Figure 6).

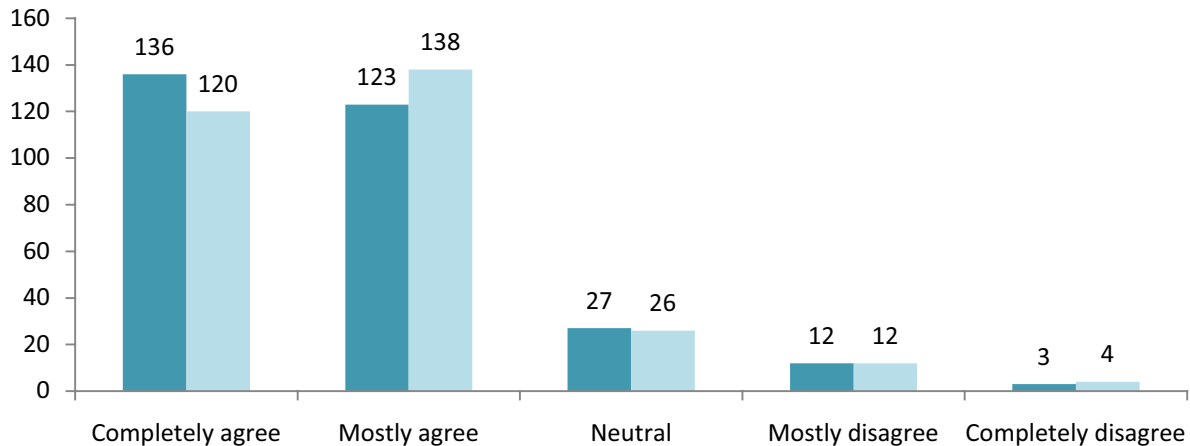
Figure 6. Rating of Adequacy of Initial Training in Preparation to be a Foster Parent



Foster Care Recruitment and Retention Survey (N=301)

Eighty-six percent (259) of foster parents responded that their access to ongoing training was satisfactory (Figure 7). Eighty-six percent (258) of foster parents rated the content of ongoing training as satisfactory.

Figure 7. Rating of Foster Parent Access to Ongoing Training and Satisfaction with Training Content



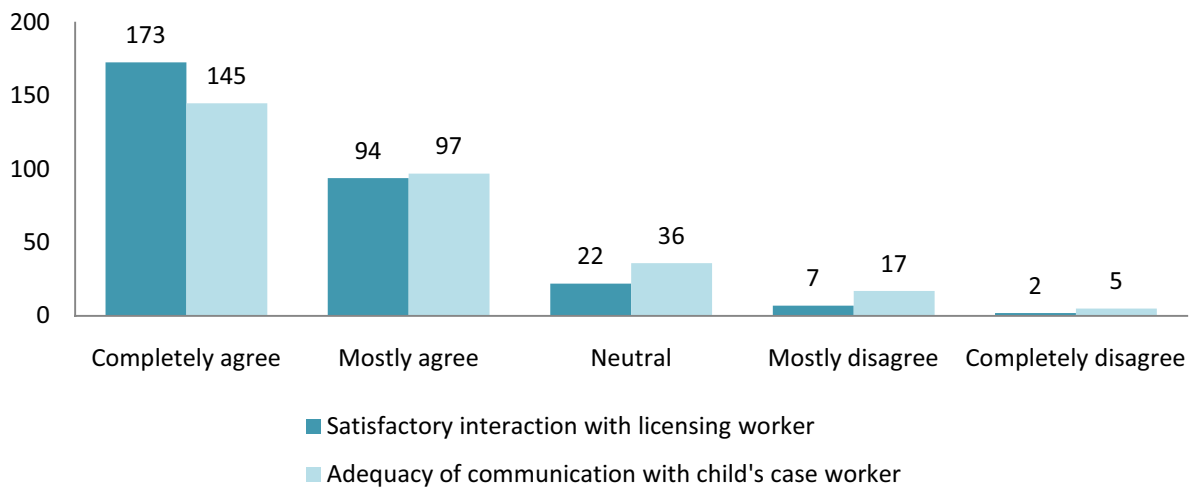
Foster Care Recruitment and Retention Survey (Access N=301; Content N=300)

Staff Consultation/Support for Foster Parents

How satisfying was the interaction between foster parent and the licensing worker? Of the 298 foster parent respondents, 90% (267) were satisfied (Figure 8).

How did the foster parent rate the adequacy of communication with the child's case worker/other social worker? Of the 300 foster parent respondents, 81% (242) evaluated the communication as adequate.

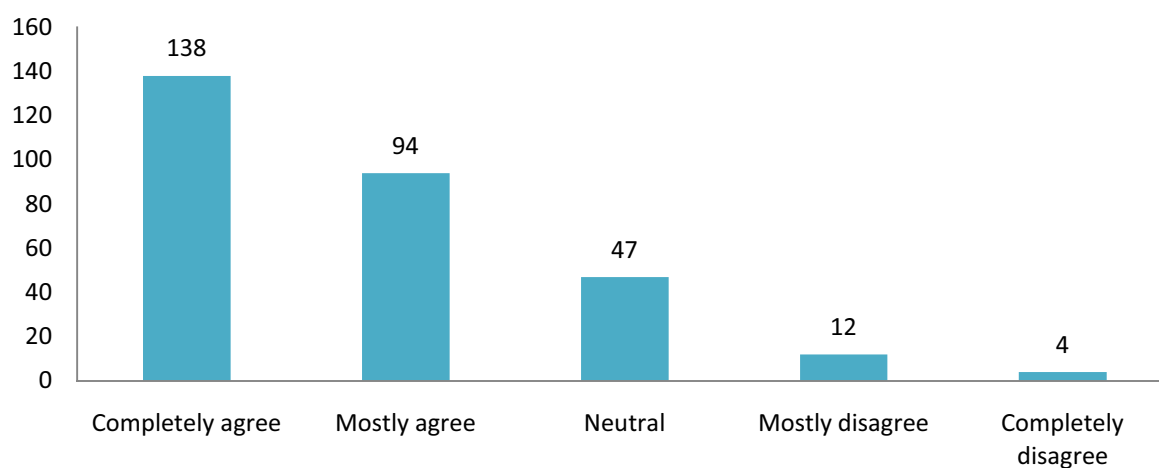
Figure 8. Rating of Staff Consultation



Foster Care Recruitment and Retention Survey (Interaction N=298; Communication N=300)

Of the 295 foster parents, 79% (232) agreed with the statement, “I feel like an important part of a professional team” (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Feeling of importance as part of a professional team



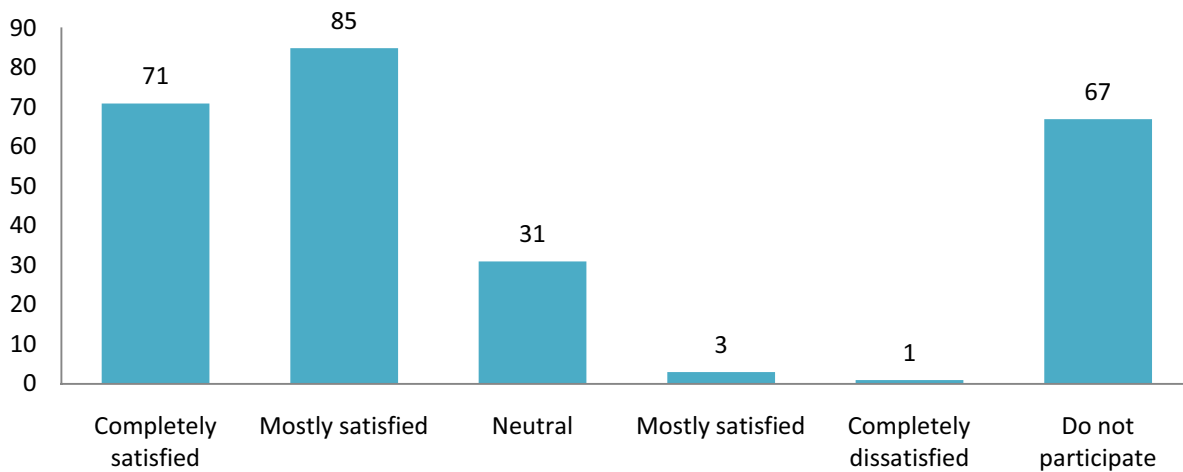
Foster Care Recruitment and Retention Survey (N=295)

Foster/Adoptive Parent Support Group

Foster/adoptive parent support groups are available throughout North Dakota. Among the 238 foster parent respondents, 171 were participants and 67 were non-participants in foster/adoptive parent support groups in their area. Of the 171 participants, 91% (156) were satisfied with the support they received in their foster/adoptive parent support group. Appendix D includes verbatim responses from 92 foster care providers to the survey question: “What support, not currently available, would be helpful to you?” The following are a sample of four responses:

- “More respite hours for difficult children so foster parents can attend activities together. Cell phone subsidies- the cost of networking to agencies is borne by us. A guaranteed weekend off once a year for couples/singles to travel.”
- “On going education.”
- “We would like to see more community support from retailers (i.e., being able to purchase items like car seats at a discount).”
- “Grief counseling after you have had a child for a long time, then they are gone.”

Figure 10. How satisfied are you with the support you received through the parent support group in your area?



Foster Care Recruitment and Retention Survey (N=238)

Reasons for Becoming a Foster Parent

What were the initial reasons for foster parents deciding to pursue licensure? Foster parents may have one or more reason for becoming a foster parent (Appendix E). If they mentioned more than one of the most common reasons, their response is included in all of them. The coding for the survey (Appendix B) responses is listed in parenthesis. The most frequent responses, from 303 respondents, were:

- 24% stated they became foster parent(s) to help children (HP).
- 20% stated they became foster parent(s) because they love children (LK).
- 13% stated they became foster parent(s) due to the need for foster parents (DN).
- 9% stated they became foster parent(s) to provide a safe and nurturing home to children.

The most frequent responses do not tell the story of those foster care parents with alternative reasons for choosing this path. The following is a select sample of 10 reasons:

- "I feel that I can make a difference in some child's life. I have the love, understanding and patience it takes to be a foster parent. I had kinship care of my 9 year old sister when I was 24. We had always been close, so it really wasn't a surprise when she came to live with me and my family. My parents were nearing 50 and were just tired out from raising 7 kids. She lived with us for a year then went back home. This was the start for me to becoming a foster parent for PATH for 3 years."
- "To be a 'parent.' I do not have any children."
- "Because I was a foster child."
- "Because all my own children were grown, and was very lonely at times, and also my own cousin called me one day (out of the blue) and asked me if I would take care of her kids. I was speechless because she had confidence, trust, and she was really loyal, so, I started all my paper work, and all necessary paper work to become a foster parent to be there for other children also."
- "Had an empty bedroom and a passion to offer a hurting child a chance in life."
- "We know foster parents in our area. We were very interested. The opportunity came up and we applied. We are eternally grateful for the chance to care for foster children. Their small leaps and bounds are major to them and a joy to us."
- "I worked in a classroom for emotionally disturbed children. A new 4th grade student was placed in our classroom. It was a temporary placement until there was room at the Dakota Boys Ranch. I fell in love with this cute little brown eyed boy. I went home crying and begged my husband to become a foster parent. Lucky for me, my husband had an aunt and uncle who had been foster parents so he said okay."
- "I was asked by a one of my son's friends if he could move in with us as his former foster parents were retiring from foster care. It was the best thing I have ever done."
- "My parents had fostered many children while I was growing up and I saw the gratitude of those children and I learned to have and demonstrate a higher level of compassion to others because of that experience. I want that experience for my children."
- "I became a foster parent because I believe every child has the right to have a home. A home where they are cared for encouraged to reach for their full potential and are safe. A home where they can learn appropriate behavior, to more easily fit into society. They deserve an education and a home to build good memories. And people who are in their corner."

Reasons for Continuing as a Foster Parent

Why do foster parents continue to remain actively licensed? The most frequent reasons, from 297 respondents, are:

- 30% expressed their continued interest in foster parenting due to the rewarding experience.
- 16% expressed their continued interest in foster parenting to help children.
- 13% expressed their continued interest in foster parenting because they love children.
- 11% expressed their continued interest in foster parenting due to the need for foster parents.

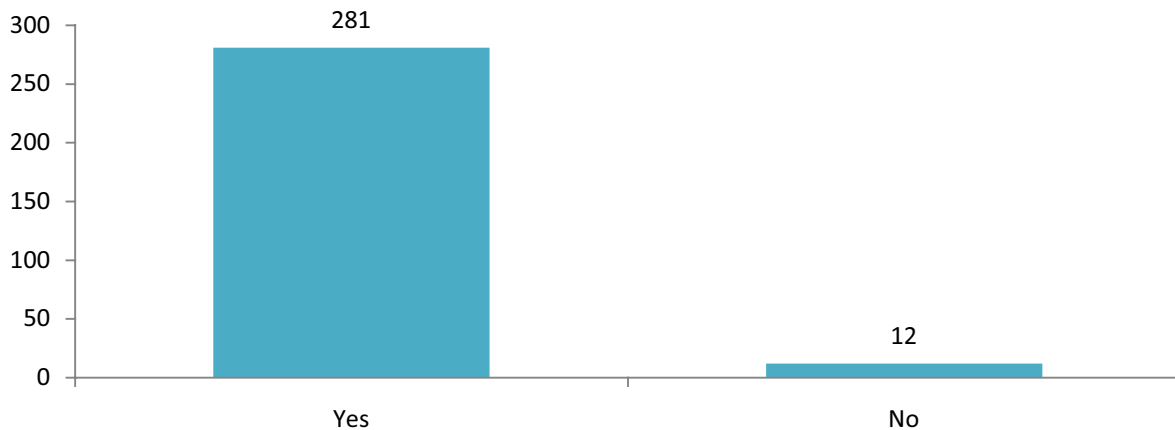
The reasons why foster parents continue to provide care for children are varied. The respondents' explanations for continued foster parenting are seen in Appendix F. The following is a sample of 9 responses:

- "We have enjoyed the children and activity in our home. We have had many ups and downs, but the ups are what help us trying to help these children. We have one foster child who is now enrolled in college, she calls and talks every couple of weeks Since she left, she always says I love you and we love her too. She had a lot of rough times after she left, but we let her know we'd always be there for her. We'd like to think that we planted a seed and that it's growing and that with our encouragement she'll succeed."
- "Because not only do we make a difference to children - these children make a difference in our lives."
- "After my wife died I was out of it for a couple of years until my kids told me to get back into it or stay away from them. It is now part of my retirement and I can't imagine not doing it."
- "Now that we have become involved, I don't know how we could turn around and not take children into our home."
- "It's almost like an addiction. Once you start you can't quit. DN. Every child is a new experience- some good and some not so good. You keep doing the best that you can."
- "To see these kids change, grow, and gain self confidence. They may tell you they hate your guts- but all but 1 of my girls have come back to see me. They call, and all tell me I made a big difference in their lives. That's why I do it."
- "The more children we have who have left us, the more children we would like to help. It is very fulfilling experience. You feel a void when they leave."
- "The day to day successes are immeasurable- but our job is not complete yet."
- "It is very fulfilling. The smiles, hugs, and high fives."

Foster Parent Recommendation

Ninety-six percent (281) of foster care providers stated that they would recommend being a foster family to friend and relatives (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Would you recommend being a foster family to your friends and relatives?



Foster Care Recruitment and Retention Survey (N=293)

A comprehensive list expanding on the reasons why the foster parent would or would not recommend being a foster family to friends and family is found in Appendix G. The most common responses from the 295 respondents were:

- 53% listed that they would recommend being a foster parent due to the rewarding (REW) experience,
- 29% listed that they would recommend being a foster parent due to the need for foster parents (DN), and
- 14% listed that they would recommend being a foster parent to help children (HP).

The following foster parent responses are a sample of those that were not coded in any of the aforementioned categories:

- “This service takes focus off of self. A character builder. Some family members could sure use this!”
- “I have learned that most of the children I work with just need love and attention and someone they can trust and depend on to be there for them.”
- “These children don't ask for much, maybe a bedtime story, playing a game together, watching a movie together, a walk, bike ride, mostly just your time and understanding.”
- “I think it takes a special person to be a foster parent. You have to be able to accept, even when it goes against what you believe. Day in and day out, it's one struggle, etc. Your life is just never the same. Even the most wonderful people are not always right. So yes I would recommend to someone I thought was the right type, if not, no I wouldn't and I always tell them the good along with the bad.”

Foster Parent Barriers

The foster care providers were asked to identify any barriers that may prevent someone from becoming a foster parent (Appendix H). The most common responses, from the 266 respondents, were:

- 29% listed a barrier as being the time (TM) commitment involved in foster parenting,
- 20% listed a barrier as the expense (EXP) of providing care for foster care children, and
- 19% listed a barrier as the foster care parent being too attached (TC) to the children.

The following are four foster parent responses elaborating on additional barriers foster parents may encounter:

- "Finding daycare, especially on short notice."
- "Most people are worried how it might affect their own children."
- "Ability to work with a team sometimes can be very frustrating. Being able to see beyond the child in front of you to see the potential, not the 'damaged' child. Knowing this child could go home at any time, knowing it still isn't a good situation."
- "The stereotype of them all being 'bad' kids, or 'problem' children. Since being a foster mom, I have found people who don't think that the kids are 'really' foster children. There seems to be a bad stereotype that they all behave as badly or have a certain appearance when they are in the system."

Appendix A. Foster Care Recruitment and Retention Cover Letter and Survey



John Hoeven, Governor
Carol K. Olson, Executive Director

September 19, 2007

Dear Foster Parent:

"I'm a Foster Parent, Pretty Cool . . . Huh? A window cling proclaiming this important fact is enclosed as a "thank you" for the service that you provide to North Dakota's children.

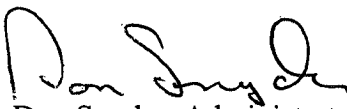
Family foster homes are a valuable resource in North Dakota. Across the state, there is a serious shortage of foster homes for abused and neglected children who are unable to remain in their home and need temporary care. Infants, toddlers, school-age children and teens all need homes. The North Dakota Department of Human Services, Children & Family Services Division (CFS), wants to do everything it can to improve and maintain this important safety net for foster children.

We need your help. CFS is attempting to identify ways in which we can more successfully recruit and retain foster parents. We value your opinion. We would appreciate it if you would complete the enclosed survey and return it in the self-addressed postage paid envelope by **October 3, 2007**. If you are married, please discuss the questions and answer them collectively. Any detail you can provide will be greatly appreciated. If space does not allow in the survey, please feel free to add a separate sheet of paper.

Thank you for your feedback. We sincerely appreciate your honest opinion and will take your input into consideration in future foster parent recruitment and retention discussions. Identifying information (name, address, etc.) will not be included in the report and will not be shared outside the research team compiling the results. A copy of the final report can be requested from Children & Family Services after December 1, 2007.

A drawing will be held at the close of the North Dakota Foster Parent Association Training Conference in October for foster parents who have completed the survey. The winner will receive a one-night stay at the Seven Seas in Mandan and a dinner for two in a Bismarck restaurant. **You do not have to be present to win.** Thank you for your time and assistance.

Sincerely,


Don Snyder, Administrator
Foster Care Program

FOSTER CARE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

NORTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

DIVISION OF FOSTER CARE

SFN 58655 (8-2007)

Please respond thoroughly to the following two questions. The 'voice' you bring to the experience of fostering will be invaluable as we proceed with plans on recruiting and retaining new foster parents. If you need additional room for your answers, please use another sheet of paper.

Why did you become a foster parent?

Why have you continued in your role as a foster parent?

Would you recommend being a foster family to your friends and relatives? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Please explain why.

Please identify any barriers that may prevent someone from becoming a foster parent.

What is the total number of foster children you have cared for as a

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9+
County family foster care provider	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Therapeutic family foster care provider	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Foster home with intent to adopt	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Foster parent for a specified child	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Family support (PATH) home	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Respite care home	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Shelter care home	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

If you have not had any placements, please explain why: _____

Please rate the following regarding foster parent training:

	Completely Agree	Mostly Agree	Neutral	Mostly Disagree	Completely Disagree
The initial training I received adequately prepared me to be a foster parent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Access to ongoing training is satisfactory	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Content of ongoing training is satisfactory	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please rate the following regarding staff consultation/support:

	Completely Agree	Mostly Agree	Neutral	Mostly Disagree	Completely Disagree
Interaction with the licensing worker is satisfactory	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My communication with the child's case worker/other social workers is adequate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel like an important part of a professional team	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Is there a foster/adoptive parent support group available in your region? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, how satisfied are you with the support you receive through this group?

☐ Completely Satisfied
 ☐ Mostly Satisfied
 ☐ Neutral
 ☐ Mostly Dissatisfied
 ☐ Completely Dissatisfied
 ☐ Do Not Participate

If no, would you participate in a foster/adoptive support group if one were available? ☐ Yes ☐ No

What support, not currently available, would be helpful to you?

I am willing to be contacted by research staff if further questions come up. ☐ Yes ☐ No

Telephone Number () - -

